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Chairman: Mr. Macedo ..... (Mexico)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 81: Effects of atomic radiation (A/53/46, A/53/478, A/53/481 and A/C.4/53/L.6)

1. **Mr. Lindell** (Sweden), introducing the draft resolution on the effects of atomic radiation (A/C.4/53/L.6), said that, as requested by the General Assembly at its 52nd session, the Committee would review the functioning of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation in the light of the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Since the establishment of the Scientific Committee in 1955, States' concerns regarding the effects of atomic radiation had changed and the sources of such radiation had multiplied, but the work of the Scientific Committee had lost none of its importance. Despite the cessation of atmospheric weapons tests, many radionuclides were still being released into the environment by nuclear power plants or as a result of their use in medicine, agriculture and industry. There was also a growing awareness of the many natural radiation sources. The Scientific Committee continued to collect data on radiation doses and the attendant risks, such as cancer and genetic mutation. It also studied the effects of radiation and the combined effects of ionizing radiation and other agents.

2. In 1995, the Scientific Committee had begun a new programme to review the sources, exposure and biological effects of ionizing radiation. The comprehensive report which it would publish in the year 2000 would provide up-to-date information on the state of knowledge in the field at the end of the millennium. The Scientific Committee, which was the definitive authority on atomic radiation, provided a remarkable example of efficiency, and its work and publications guided and encouraged research throughout the world. He therefore hoped that the draft resolution which recommended that the functions and role of the Scientific Committee, including the present reporting arrangements, should be maintained, would be adopted by consensus. The sponsors had done their best to accommodate the concerns of some delegations. The draft resolution was sponsored by the member States of the European Union, Argentina, Australia, Belarus, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Poland, Thailand and Ukraine.

3. **Mr. Wimmer** (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the States members of the European Union had sponsored the draft resolution and that the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, the associated country Cyprus and the European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Community, associated themselves with a statement.

4. The Scientific Committee, which had been established in order to collect and evaluate the available information on the effects of ionizing radiation upon man and his environment, had become the primary world authority in that regard.

5. The European Union hoped that the fruitful cooperation between the Scientific Committee and the other relevant United Nations bodies and international organizations would continue. It supported the recommendation made by IAEA and WHO that the Scientific Committee's current functions and independent role, including the reporting arrangements, should be maintained.

6. The European Union awaited with interest the publication in the year 2000 of a report on consequences of the Chernobyl accident and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which would make it possible to better assess the harmful effect of accidental, medical or occupational exposure to radiation on victims and their progeny. The Scientific Committee's reports would continue to serve as a basis for the drawing up of national and international standards for protection against the harmful effects of radiation. In closing, he reiterated the European Union's support for the Scientific Committee.

7. **Mr. Relang** (Marshall Islands) said that between 1946 and 1957, the Republic of the Marshall Islands had been the site of 67 nuclear weapons tests. The total yield of the bombs tested had been 7,200 times more powerful than the two atomic weapons used during the Second World War. An understanding of the effects of excessive doses of radioactive fallout on human beings and the environment had been gained from those tests at the population's expense. Documents which had been declassified had shown that the effects of the radiation were far more serious than had been thought. The inhabitants of the Marshall Islands and groups of people elsewhere in the world had suffered from those effects and would continue to do so. The number of people with radiation-related illnesses or cancer was growing at an alarming rate, a fact which was making it even more difficult to provide adequate social, health and economic services.

8. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of the Marshall Islands had stated during the general debate of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, the information concerning the effects of nuclear weapons that had been gained from the testing programme carried out in the Marshall Islands had helped to prevent nuclear war during the cold war era. The people of the Marshall Islands and of other Pacific islands had, therefore,

borne a disproportionate burden in that regard. In its advisory opinion on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons, the International Court of Justice had recognized that the members of the international community had an obligation to achieve nuclear disarmament. His Government therefore felt all the more justified in drawing that community's attention to the effects of atomic radiation on the people of the Marshall Islands and in requesting its assistance.

9. Although his Government welcomed the past studies carried out by the Scientific Committee, it believed that those studies should be developed in such a way as to assist populations suffering from the effects of atomic radiation. He urged the Scientific Committee to give consideration to the proposals of member States which had offered to help it to do so. His Government, for its part, was willing to make available the declassified documents in its possession, which it was currently placing in a computerized record in order to facilitate consultation.

10. His delegation was not seeking to cast blame, since blame had already been accepted. It welcomed the spirit of partnership displayed by the Government of the United States of America and would endeavour, with its limited means, to assist communities which planned to resettle elsewhere. However, he requested that a second team of experts should first verify the conclusions on which those plans were based in order to prevent those who wished to resettle in possibly contaminated areas from placing themselves at risk. He again urged Governments and international organizations specializing in the field to provide the assistance needed to determine the possibilities for resettlement of those people, clean up the affected areas and dispose of or contain radioactive contaminants.

11. **Mr. Kittikhoun** (Lao People's Democratic Republic), speaking on behalf of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that for the past 43 years, the Scientific Committee had played an important role in providing impartial information on the risks of exposure to atomic radiation. He welcomed the report of the Scientific Committee (A/53/46) and, in particular, the information on the effects of radiation on people and environment, and was pleased to note that the Scientific Committee had decided to place greater emphasis on new sources of radiation and on the combined effects of radiation and other agents.

12. He noted with satisfaction that WHO and IAEA had cooperated with the Scientific Committee in 1998 and urged other United Nations bodies, particularly the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and IAEA, and other relevant international organizations to continue to provide support to and increase their cooperation with the Scientific Committee.

13. Nuclear technology and the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes could be of great use to humanity, particularly in the fields of medicine, industry and agriculture, where they played an increasingly important role in improving the quality of life, especially in developing countries. ASEAN called for an increase in the transfer of nuclear technology to developing countries, and asked that they should be provided with assistance in gaining free access to that technology.

14. The most effective way of diminishing the potentially harmful effects of atomic radiation would be the control or removal of its sources. In addition to the risks mentioned in chapter IV of the Scientific Committee's report, the ill-effects of radiation also resulted from the operation of unsafe nuclear power plants, the dumping of nuclear submarines on the high seas, the illicit trafficking in nuclear materials, nuclear testing and, of course, the use of nuclear weapons. It was, therefore, essential that steps should be taken to guarantee the enforcement of all internationally accepted safety standards. In 1998, the States members of ASEAN, meeting in Manila, had reaffirmed their conviction that the doctrine of nuclear deterrence was obsolete and that everything possible must be done to free the world from nuclear weapons.

15. The heads of State and Government of the ASEAN countries had all signed the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone Treaty, which had entered into force on 27 March 1997 and had been deposited with the United Nations in June 1997. ASEAN once again called on all States which possessed nuclear weapons to accede to the Protocol to that Treaty.

16. All States, both large and small, were concerned at the danger of atomic radiation. ASEAN was convinced that if the international community had the necessary political will, it could put an end to the catastrophic effects of man-made atomic radiation. For its part, it would continue to provide the Scientific Committee with its unwavering support and cooperation.

17. **Ms. Dong Guilan** (China) summarized the activities of the Scientific Committee, noting that its importance in the fields of public health and environmental quality had been clearly demonstrated.

18. In view of the importance of the work of the Scientific Committee, which was the primary international body responsible for assessing the health hazards associated with exposure to atomic radiation, her delegation supported the

report's recommendation that the current functions and role of the Scientific Committee, including its reporting arrangements, should be maintained.

19. Her Government would continue to cooperate fully with the Scientific Committee and to promote research on the effects of atomic radiation and radiological protection.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.